



November 13, 2013

#### TESTIMONY REGARDING HB 5111 and HB 5112

AFT Michigan thanks the House Education Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding House Bills 5111 and 5112.

#### HB 5111

We share the bill sponsor's goal of improving literacy and inspiring joy for reading for Michigan's elementary school students. AFT Michigan recognizes the importance of reading proficiency, particularly in the third grade milestone year when students transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. We also recognize that advancing students to their next grade before they are ready negatively impacts student learning. Further, evidence suggests that retention has an overall negative impact on student achievement in the long term.

Given that approximately 36,000 Michigan third graders scored below "proficient" on the MEAP reading exam last year, AFT Michigan appreciates the Legislature's desire to create policy to address this problem. However, decisions to retain students must be made holistically — certainly not from one single measure that does nothing to assess and diagnose why the student is struggling.

AFT Michigan encourages legislators to support literacy education by championing — and funding — programs that identify struggling readers early and provide a variety of remediation and intervention services.

#### HB 5112

AFT Michigan opposes HB 5112 in its current form. It is true that the current school accountability system implemented by the Michigan Department of Education is complex, however AFT Michigan encourages improving the current system. Given that MDE school accountability scorecards are designed as diagnostic tools, it is clear that the underlying principle of this program is school improvement.

The system prescribed in HB 5112, however, lacks the same focus on school improvement. By grading schools on a curve, HB 5112 not only mandates that 5 percent of schools always be marked "failing," regardless of their performance, but it limits the number of schools which could be marked as successful with A or B grades. Further, given that the bill forces about 33 percent of schools to be marked with a D or F, a message is sent to students, teachers, parents, and the public that a third of Michigan schools are not performing satisfactorily. This will likely result in a significant, negative impact on morale for all parties.

AFT Michigan recommends the Legislature work with the Michigan Department of Education and State Board of Education to adjust and improve the current school accountability system, instead of creating additional confusion and frustration by implementing an entirely new system.

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